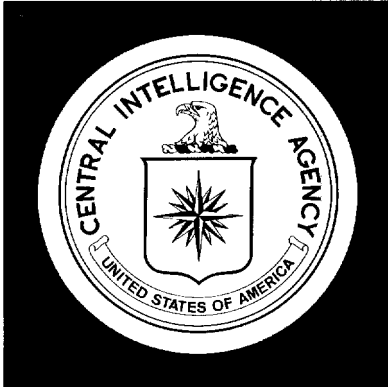


Confidential

*Formerly
Staff Memo 48-72
25 Oct 72*



OFFICE OF
NATIONAL ESTIMATES

MEMORANDUM

Colombia: Politics Unchained

MORI/CDF

Confidential

3 November 1972

Copy No.

W A R N I N G

This document contains information affecting the national defense of the United States, within the meaning of Title 18, sections 793 and 794, of the US Code, as amended. Its transmission or revelation of its contents to or receipt by an unauthorized person is prohibited by law.



25X1

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

3 November 1972

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Colombia: Politics Unchained*

Colombia was regarded as a showcase for the Alliance for Progress during the early 1960s. It still retains many positive features by the usual US standards: a commitment to constitutional politics, a pro-US foreign policy, a talent for private enterprise, a military seemingly content to counter insurgents, and economic prospects that are better than fair. Mixed with these are

a history of fratricidal partisanship; challenges to the establishment not only from demagogic populism but from such other self-proclaimed champions of the people as revolutionary guerrillas and priests; and such typical problems of developing nations as gross income inequalities and rapid population growth.

Maneuvering has already begun for the general elections in 1974 -- the first unrestricted contest since political party leaders agreed on a National Front arrangement 15 years ago. Prospects for the moderate political forces look better now than

* This paper has been discussed with other components within CIA, but has not been formally coordinated.

CONFIDENTIAL

they did when the last estimate was prepared (Colombia, NIE 88-71, 15 April 1971). In particular, the immediate threat from the anti-establishment ANAPO seems to have collapsed. A new estimate may prove useful sometime next year. This memorandum provides an interim assessment of the various political elements operating for and against peaceful passage to more openly competitive and uncertain politics.

* * * * *

The National Front 1958-1974 (R.I.P.)

1.

Political rivalry under its two-party system has had a religious ferocity about it, so that intolerance between Conservatives and Liberals has led the country over and over again into civil war. The last round of political strife, in the 1950s, cost hundreds of thousands of lives, a national horror institutionalized in the language and literature as *la violencia*.

2. In 1953 the partisan warfare became so rabid that the political leaders accepted the military dictatorship of General Rojas Pinilla as a lesser evil, despite a strong tradition of civilian rule. By 1957, Rojas' authoritarianism met the combined resistance of the traditional parties, the Church, and the business community. The military withdrew support from Rojas and he was

CONFIDENTIAL

forced from office. After Rojas' ouster, the armed forces resumed their accustomed role as unequivocal supporters of the constitutional government.

3. In 1958, Colombia began a unique political experiment, a 16-year long entente called the National Front. The scheme involved a strict sharing of power between Liberals and Conservatives, with the presidency alternating between parties every four years, and with every other public office or body manned jointly on a 50-50 basis. The war-weary public accepted this contrivance of their political craftsmen, hoping the Front would correct the partisan fanaticism that plagued the nation.

4. This system has operated with great difficulty. It has been frequently crisis-ridden, regularly strained by the continual splintering of the parties and sometimes paralyzed by the requirement that important laws need a two-thirds majority. Still, the bipartisan spirit has survived in better shape than even most of the architects of the pact expected ten years ago. The agreed alternation of the presidency and most of the parity requirements are scheduled to end with the term of incumbent Conservative President Misael Pastrana in 1974.

CONFIDENTIAL

5. The prospect of open politics is a source of great anxiety in Colombia, for a variety of reasons. Most obviously, since Conservatives and Liberals still are far from fond of each other, they are apprehensive about testing whether the National Front has expunged their fratricidal tendencies. There is also some concern that the artificiality of politics over the past 15 years has rendered the traditional political groups impotent and near collapse. This fear was sharpened by a spectacular tilt at the establishment by former dictator Rojas Pinilla. His ANAPO party, an undefinable coalition of the anti-establishment, the discontented, and the politically adventurous, came near to victory in the 1970 presidential election.

6. On the other hand, some Colombians look eagerly to the end of what they believe has been a great national stagnancy. They blame the slow pace of national development on the peculiar politics of the Front, in that it has reduced the need for political competition for popular favor. In the Latin American context of formidable obstacles to development and modernization, Colombia's record of economic growth has been good, while its achievements in social reforms have been only fair. The economic growth rate has been an encouraging 6 to 7 percent per year. But because of the low starting point (a per capita GNP of less than \$400 per year)

CONFIDENTIAL

and the rapid expansion of population (more than 3 percent per year), the economic gains are spread thin. And while increasing numbers of people benefit from the steady growth of the modern sector of the economy, the numbers doomed to unrelieved poverty are also rising. Recent governments have paid increased attention to the need for improving the economic condition of the poorest classes. Nonetheless, the dominant theme remains economic growth not social justice; and, in any case, the popular programs launched so far do not seriously challenge the special interests of the political and economic elites.

The Transition

7. During these final months of transition from the National Front to something new there will be sharp maneuvering for advantage. A basic question is whether the country any longer has a two-party system. The Conservative and Liberal "parties" have become, under the Front, collections of squabbling personalist factions. The end of the Front is an obvious opportunity to realign the political forces. The various *jefes* are appraising and weighing possible new combinations; some are toying with the idea of going it alone. A sense of excitement of being at the threshold of a new era has gripped the country and has lured all the well-known political figures, including ex-presidents and sons of presidents, to the front of the stage.

CONFIDENTIAL

8. Much of the tension and insecurity about the future relates to the new mood of the electorate. Although the traditional parties have a long history and broad popular followings, government in Colombia has been the domain of the aristocrats, who call the shots. The roll of Colombian leaders includes generations of such illustrious names as Lleras, López, Ospina, Gómez. Popular alienation became an ominous force in 1970, when Rojas Pinilla's promise to take power away from these oligarchs proved a potent electoral approach, leaving him a mere 63,000 (out of 4 million) shy of victory. And this was not an isolated manifestation of active popular discontent. Labor has been striking, peasants have been seizing land, and rural violence, urban terrorism, and university disturbances have continued to come in waves. As a result, the political regulars, the "good families" of Colombia, have become more sensitive to, and perhaps a bit frightened of, the future electoral appeal of intruders on their scene such as Rojas.

9. The transition period will be confusing and dangerous. For Colombia to make the passage to a new political phase with a healthy body politic will require sophisticated leadership and probably a good deal of luck. If, for example, personal and philosophical distinctions prove strong enough to keep various party factions apart and independent, the electorate will have to

deal with an array of ill-defined tickets and the prospect of an unprecedented minority president. This is the kind of development that would be most likely to rekindle all the old grievances, spark particularist violence, and move Colombia into the ranks of the problem areas of the hemisphere.

Lining Up for the New Politics

10. Every politician is looking for the magic combination that will spell victory at the polls in 1974, and many alliances may be made and broken between now and the final presentation of an election line-up. Any coalition of factions within or between parties will require glossing over longstanding differences and hatreds, but in the end probably the centripetal forces will win out. We expect some semblance of the familiar two-party national structure to emerge.

11. In the Liberal camp, which only a few weeks ago seemed hopelessly split between evenly matched and determined rivals, movement toward unity has begun. Some of Colombia's best known *políticos* are engaged in a contest for all the Liberal chips, and the one who seems to hold the high cards is ex-president Carlos Lleras Restrepo (1966-1970). He and Alfonso López Michelson, old rivals and now partners, lead a faction called "dissident" or

"progressive". Their differences with the more conventional official Liberals led by Julio César Turbay and backed by ex-president Alberto Lleras Camargo (1958-1962) are both philosophical and personal. Following several elaborate power plays, from rump conventions to a plebiscite, Carlos Lleras managed to capture the party leadership at a convention last month. The question is whether he or anyone else can hold the factions together and present a united front at the elections. A compelling argument for unity is that together the party factions drew a 46 percent plurality in the departmental and local elections last April.* Carlos Lleras also draws a parallel with 1946, when a Liberal split allowed a Conservative presidential victory and created the prelude to the civil strife of the 1950s.

12. A single Liberal candidate would strengthen the cause of unity on the Conservative side. Now the Conservatives are polarized between the followers and opponents of Alvaro Gómez Hurtado. Gómez is in personality and philosophy a resurrection of his deceased father, Laureano Gómez, the reactionary Conservative

* Party vote totals were: Liberals, 1,383,708; Conservatives, 917,699; ANAPO, 559,821; Communist and other small groups, 124,000. The Liberal vote was split almost evenly between slates representing the "officials" and the "dissidents".

CONFIDENTIAL

president (1950-1953) most despised by the Liberals. Neither is the young Gómez well liked in his own Conservative circles, where his undisguised effort to dominate the party and lock up its presidential nomination are bitterly resented, and where his arch-conservatism is not easily swallowed by his more enlightened colleagues. Opposition to Gómez has behind it the growing prestige and influence of incumbent President Pastrana, as well as the support of the party's grand old man, Mariano Ospina (president, 1946-1950). If Gómez carries out his threat to run in 1974 regardless of the outcome of the party convention next year, there may be two Conservative candidates.

13. A puzzler in the political mix is ANAPO, whose roller-coaster fortunes mocked the conventional wisdom of both 1970 and 1972. ANAPO's strong showing in the 1970 presidential contest unnerved the establishment and created a scramble among opportunists to board the Rojas bandwagon. Then in this year's election, ANAPO's weak draw of less than a fifth of the vote -- as unexpected as its good showing in 1970 -- buoyed the traditional parties and set off a chain of defections from the Rojas camp. ANAPO's loss of following has been so large that its chances for recuperation seem poor. They depend in the first instance on the physical competence of Rojas, 72 and in delicate health -- or secondarily on the ability

CONFIDENTIAL

of his daughter, María Eugenia, to take up his mantle if necessary. The odds seem slim that the group could stay together without General Rojas to bind the disparate membership. Thus a key issue for the future may be where ANAPO's former constituency of the disgruntled will end up.

14. There is some talk of prolonging the National Front, an option leaders in both parties have an interest in keeping open. Renewal of the Front would close the presidential nomination to the "wrong" candidate (such as López or Gómez) who would be anathema to large numbers in both parties. Some of the talk is for purposes of keeping lines open to groups in the opposite camp who might be coalition partners if the traditional parties fail to unite. Moreover, the leaders see utility in keeping alive the notion of bipartisanship, foreseeing a continuing need for legislative cooperation to implement policy. But opposition to continuing a Front is strenuous: Liberals do not want to share 50-50 with a Conservative minority and Conservatives do not trust the Liberals to do so. We would expect resort to the Front only in a last ditch effort to preserve a threatened peace.

Prospects

15. The course for Colombians will be difficult over the next few years and we do not discount the possibility that the style of politics of the past will revive. But we believe the chances are good that the pragmatic and patriotic character of the Colombian leadership will in the end overcome baser partisan instincts. We expect the oligarchic (but paternalistically democratic) clique, which has already demonstrated a certain fortitude in adversity by sticking out 15 years of the uncomfortable Front pact, will again devise a new arrangement that is both reasonably effective and generally dominated by the moderate forces.

25X1

16. The ANAPO phenomenon sharpened the fear of isolation from the people among the ruling group, and the first result of the scare was to draw into instant cooperation all the feuding families constituting the establishment.

25X1

The electoral returns in 1972 show that this effort worked. Thus, in practical terms, the ANAPO threat clearly helped to resuscitate Colombia's flagging traditional parties.

17. Indeed, it also may have served to upgrade the "other Colombians" in the eyes of the ruling group. Having seen an alarming number of Colombians seduced by Rojas' promises, the political regulars are likely to pay more serious attention to the electorate than in the past. The moneyed sectors seem to understand somewhat better the necessity to effect change perceptible enough to give most Colombians a sense of having a stake in things. In general, the Liberal party is considerably more attuned to the aspirations of the various classes and more comfortable with populist programs than the business-inclined Conservatives. Either group in power, however, is likely to have a pretty good feel for what is necessary for survival. Prospects for the economy are good enough to provide some margin for further economic and social programs. Certainly, some problems will not yield even to vigorous attack and eruptions of discontent probably will mar the scene from time to time, as they have in the past. But at least for the next few years, we expect that the politicians will be innovative enough and responsive enough to maintain control of the political and social pressures for change.

Confidential

Confidential

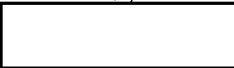
SUBJECT: Supplemental Distribution of MEMORANDUM: Colombia:
Politics Unchained

STATE: Mr. John Hugh Crimmins, ARA/LA
Ray S. Cline, INR/OD

NSC: Mr. Jorden

MEMORANDUM FOR: Ray S. Cline

A copy of the attached Memorandum has been sent to Mr. John Crimmins, ARA-LA.


JOHN HUIZENGA
Director
National Estimates

3 November 72
(DATE)

FORM NO. 101 REPLACES FORM 10-101
1 AUG 54 WHICH MAY BE USED.

(47)

25X1

25X1

Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79R00967A000500030014-2

Next 4 Page(s) In Document Exempt

Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79R00967A000500030014-2